

WASHINGTON POST
21 May 1987

APPEARED
ON PAGE A1

Singlaub Testifies Abrams Was Contact

By Joe Pichirallo

Washington Post Staff Writer

Retired Army major general John K. Singlaub, a central figure in private efforts to support the Nicaraguan rebels, testified yesterday that Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams played a more active role than Abrams has acknowledged in efforts to raise money for the contras at a time when Congress had banned U.S. military assistance.

Singlaub, testifying for the first time before the congressional Iran-contra panels, said that fired National Security Council aide Lt. Col.

Oliver L. North was his chief contact during most of the ban on U.S. aid. But by the spring of 1986, Singlaub said, "the principal contact for activities in Central America, specifically the Nicaraguan democratic resistance, was Elliott Abrams."

Singlaub testified that last May Abrams agreed to provide private assurances to two foreign governments—identified by other sources as Taiwan and South Korea—that the administration approved of Singlaub's efforts to raise funds for the contras from both countries.

However, Abrams has told the Tower special review panel that he told Singlaub he could not help him solicit aid. "I said I can't do that," Abrams told the panel. "It's just not right."

Singlaub said Abrams acquiesced in his plan of March 1986 to try to persuade Eden Pastora, the once-famed "Commander Zero" who turned against Nicaragua's Sandinista government, to reunite with the other contra forces.

Abrams was out of town yesterday and could not be reached for comment.

A vigorous contra supporter, Abrams has consistently denied violating the congressional ban on U.S. aid to the contras and has said he did not play an active role in efforts by North and others to arrange private aid for the rebels.

Abrams told the Tower panel, "We did not engage in, nor did we really know anything about this private network."

When a secret contra air resupply operation was exposed last October after a car-

go plane was shot down over Nicaragua, Abrams told a congressional oversight panel: "I can tell you there was no government role in this flight." Recent testimony before the joint House and Senate Iran-contra panels has revealed that North played a key role in supervising the air resupply operation and that several other U.S. officials also provided assistance.

As the administration's point man for the contra program since he became assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs in July 1985, Abrams worked closely with North and served on the special government panel, the Restricted Interagency Group (RIG), which supervised the contra program. The RIG's members included North, Central Intelligence Agency officials and others from the State Department.

Singlaub testified that he first solicited money for contra military needs from countries sources identified as Taiwan and South Korea in late 1984 and 1985. He said he acted with North's "blessing."

Before he revisited the two countries in mid-1986, Singlaub said, he briefed Abrams on his earlier solicitations and told Abrams that he wanted to work out in advance how administration support for his request—"a signal"—could be sent to both countries.

"He [Abrams] concurred in the solicitation of both [countries] ... and said that he would be the one that would give the signal," the general said.

But while Singlaub was in one of the countries, he said, Abrams telephoned and told him not to follow through with the solicitations. Abrams later told him that the solicitation was going to be made by someone at the "highest level" of the U.S. government, Singlaub testified.

In his account of what appears to be the same episode to the Tower panel, Abrams said: "One time this summer [of 1986], I would say, Gen. Singlaub called me from Asia ... and said I can get some aid for the contras ... if you just sort of let this foreign government know ... this is official." But Abrams said he declined to do so.

Beginning in October 1985, Congress permitted the State Department to solicit nonlethal aid for the contras from foreign countries. Abrams has admitted that, with the approval of Secretary of State George P. Shultz, last August he solicited a \$10 million donation for the contras from the sultan of Brunei. Singlaub did not say what type of aid—lethal or nonlethal—he told Abrams he was going to solicit.